



# **Alton's Black History: The legacies behind Killion Park**

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February 22 2018 3:46 PM



ALTON - What was once called Salu Park has since been renamed as James H. Killion Park at Salu, thanks to the combined efforts of Abe "Lee" Barham and several other community members.

In fact, it was when the rims at that park were taken down due to "excessive littering" in 2017 when Barham brought the book *20th Century African American Leaders in Alton* to the newsroom of Riverbender.com, specifically so the story of James H. Killion. That

publication, which has been the basis of this series, is available for purchase at the Alton Museum of History and Art. The rims have been restored, and neighborhoods around the park have promised to keep the litter in check, but who was Killion? Why would his name be attached to a park off Washington and Salu?

Killion was born in Alton in 1918. He received his education through a segregated Alton School System and continued in the former Shurtleff College before graduating to the University of Illinois and the University of Missouri Steel.

Killion used that Missouri education and became the first black person hired by Laclede Steel. He worked there for 38 years, retiring in 1983. During his time there, he was a member of the union, and was the first black person elected to an office within that union.

He was also the first person of color to enlist in the U.S. Army from Alton during the height of World War II. Killion was a part of the D-Day invasion on the beaches of Normandy and was a reservist called to action during the Korean Conflict.

In his community, Killion was a major advocate of integration within Alton. He annexed the Oakwood Area into the Alton City Limits so the majority black population of that area could enjoy city services. He was also a member of the Alton Human Relations Commission – a forerunner to the Alton Community Relations Commission. He also served on the Dunbar PTA, was a member of the advisory board of St. Joseph Hospital, was the General Co-Chairperson of the Alton/Wood River United Fund Drive, was a board member of the Alton/Godfrey Human Development Resource Center, was a member of the NAACP, served as the President of the Board of Senior Services Plus and was a board member of the Southwestern Illinois Area Agency on Aging.

He also worked with kids in the community, serving both as a Boy Scout leader and a baseball coach. He also served as referee at junior high basketball games and was the director of the Methodist Youth Fellowship.

Church also played a role in Killion's life. His father was a reverend, and Killion served as trustee for the Allen Chapel AME Church for 28 years. He was also Sunday School Superintendent and choir treasurer.

Killion came from heroes of the Alton community, which may have served as inspirations for him as he did the work Alton needed. His father, Reverend James Killion, Sr. and mother, Lottie Wyatt Killion, were both spectacular examples of Altonians.



Rev. Killion was employed as an electrician at Young's Dry Goods and also served as a minister at Tabernacle Baptist Church and Union Baptist Church. He served as the assistant minister to Morning Star Baptist Church, and was the community's on-call minister for weddings, funerals and other family services requiring a minister, his entry in *20<sup>th</sup> Century African American Leaders in Alton* stated.

Lottie Killion received her education in the St. Louis School System and graduated from Sumner High School. She was employed in Carlyle, Illinois as well as Union Baptist Church and the Alton School System. She worked diligently in her community and church, her entry in that book stated.

Outside of Union Baptist Church, Lottie Killion was also involved in Morning Star Baptist Church. She was the Past State President of Federated Clubs, a member of the Council of Clubs in East St. Louis, the Unity Federated Club of Alton and American Legion Auxillary #354.